News release

Further tests on smoke plume

13 December 2005

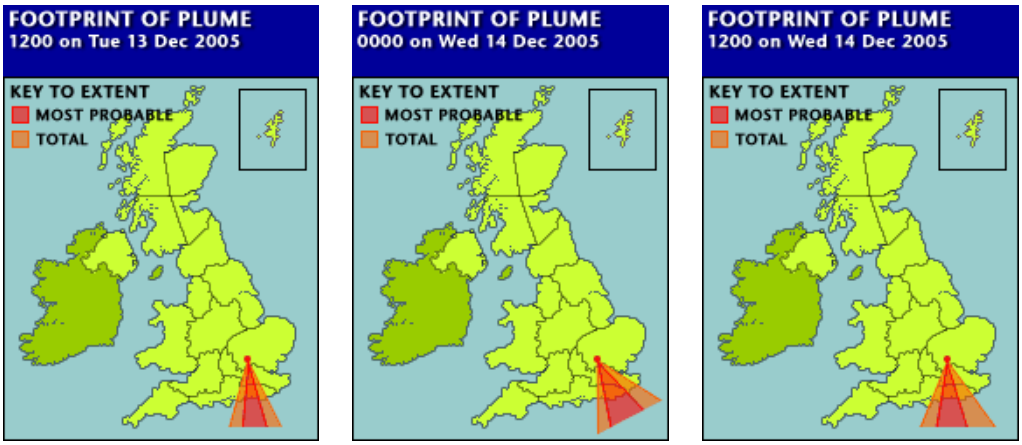
Scientists from the Met Office are hoping to fly into the smoke plume again today to get a clearer idea of what it contains.

A flight, by the Met Office/NERC research aircraft on Monday was only able to gather information from the fringes of the plume. However, initial findings are that the cloud is not toxic and mainly consists of carbon particles.

The Met Office has expertise in modelling releases into the atmosphere and is working with other agencies and groups to assess the changing situation.

The Met Office/NERC aircraft is fitted with hi-tech equipment - including an aerosol mass spectrometer which can analyse the chemistry of particles in the smoke.

As a result of a change in wind direction today the smoke is expected to move towards southern and south-east England. Light patchy rain is also forecast but it is not expected to cause any large scale wash-out of the sooty particles at ground level.



Anyone concerned about the smoke is advised to contact NHS Direct or the Health Protection Agency for advice on health implications. For environmental enquiries please contact Defra.

A Met Office spokesman was quoted in the media as commenting about the potential effects on milk production. The Met Office has made no assertions. Dairy UK has made it clear that no effects are anticipated.

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